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# Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session on the evaluation of the Department of Public Information

## Note by the Secretary-General

In conformity with paragraph 5 (e) (i) of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the attached report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session on the evaluation of the Department of Public Information, dated 30 March 1999. The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and offices. The Secretary-General takes note of its findings and concurs with its recommendations.

* E/AC.51/1999/1.

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## Annex

# Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session on the evaluation of the Department of Public Information

## Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

*Summary*

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decision on an in-depth evaluation.

The Department of Public Information has made an effort to follow through on a number of recommendations of the Committee. The Department pursued a more active way of using traditional media, such as radio broadcasting, and new electronic media; it is also developing a more effective news-gathering and delivery system. However, progress is uneven and the effect of measures adopted in 1997 and 1998 — following the reorientation of United Nations public information activities — needs to be reviewed at a later time, in particular progress in developing partnerships with important redisseminators of information.

Recommendations of the Committee on the issuance of a Secretary-General's bulletin on disclosure of information, and on the adoption of a policy for approving new United Nations publications, aimed at improving the quality of publications, were not implemented. Recommendations are made to address this situation.

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# I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-sixth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the in-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information (E/AC.51/1996/2). The Committee endorsed recommendations 1 to 13, 14.A, 15, 16, 18 and 19, contained in the report, with the understanding that: (a) regarding recommendation 4.C, the Secretariat would publish all materials listed in the approved programme budget; (b) regarding recommendations 15 and 16, implementation take into account the various national interests and contexts, and that collaboration with non-governmental organizations strictly adhere to the requirements of the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

2. At its thirty-sixth session, CPC decided that the in-depth evaluation report, together with its conclusions and recommendations thereon, should be transmitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session, in 1997, for consideration and appropriate action. CPC invited the extended bureau of the Committee on Information to follow up the recommendations endorsed (see A/51/16 (part I),[1] para. 75)

3. In March 1997, in a letter entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations system" addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General stated that a sweeping revamping of the United Nations public information capacity is an urgent requirement, that revamping these services would be in line with intergovernmental recommendations which have already been made, and that action to implement these recommendations has not kept pace, however, with the urgent nature of the problem. In April 1997, he appointed the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities. In September 1997, the Committee on Information was informed of the conclusions of the Task Force, and that the Secretary-General concurred with the main thrust of its recommendations. In 1998, the Secretary-General reported to the Committee on the implementation of the measures, drawn from a number of recommendations of the Task Force, approved by the General Assembly. The main thrust of the measures, including the need to develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization, and a number of specific measures, such as building partnerships with important information redisseminators, follows the same basic orientation of the recommendations of the OIOS evaluation report endorsed by CPC. The Department of Public Information informed OIOS, at the end of 1998, that it did not transmit to the Committee on Information the in-depth evaluation report and the conclusions and recommendations of CPC on it because the Committee had concentrated its efforts on the Secretary-General's reform proposals.

4. In March 1998, the Secretary-General appointed a Director of Communications in his Office to assist in developing an overall communications strategy for the Organization and to coordinate efforts to ensure coherence and clarity in delivering the messages of the United Nations. To this end, the Director of Communications convenes weekly meetings of the Communications Group, composed of the various parts of the Secretariat engaged in communications functions.

# II. Findings

## A. Overall strategy of the Department of Public Information

*Recommendation 1. Overall strategy of the Department of Public Information*

In keeping with its basic mandate, resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, the primary activity of the Department should be to assist and rely upon established governmental and non-governmental agencies of information to provide the public with information about the United Nations; the Department should engage in activities that will supplement the services of existing agencies of information to the extent that these are insufficient to provide adequate information. The role of the Department should be primarily to provide services useful to agencies of information and other redisseminators such as non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. Recommendations 2, 4–7, 9–13, 15 and 16 below apply this principle to specific services and functions.

*Recommendation 2. Annual priorities*

A. The Department of Public Information should submit to the Committee on Information, within the framework of the approved medium-term plan and programme budget, a priority programme for the coming calendar year. The priority programme should focus on a limited set of specific topics and issues with

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 16.*

linkages between some topics and issues. The priority programme should be implemented by an information strategy that draws on resources in all the sections of the Department.

B. For other topics and issues, the Department should restrict its activities to acting as a focal point and catalyst by encouraging governmental and non-governmental information agencies, networks of specialized non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions to carry out appropriate activities. The Department should provide the necessary guidance and overall coordination, and facilitate the transmission of existing information materials to and among those carrying out the activities.

5. Reporting to the Committee on Information at its twentieth session on United Nations public information activities and on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications approved by the Assembly, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/70 B, the Department renewed its commitment to forging partnerships at the Headquarters and field levels with information redisseminators (see A/AC.198/1998/2, para. 17). The medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 stated that the Department will work in cooperation with Governments of Member States, media organizations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the business community; and that the Department will communicate the message of the United Nations more clearly and persuasively to targeted audiences among these groups. Emphasis will be on developing information strategies, promotional activities and public services that will highlight the responsibilities and capabilities of the United Nations in carrying out its tasks in the fields of sustainable development, peace and security, democracy, human rights and humanitarian assistance, as mandated by the General Assembly and directed by the Secretary-General (see A/51/6/Rev.1,[2] para. 23.2). While implementing its numerous mandated activities, which cover the whole range of issues on the agenda of the United Nations, the Department defines annual programmes which focus on special sessions of the General Assembly, international conferences or commemorations; in 1998 there were four such special events. In the promotion of thematic mandates, the Department intends to work closely with substantive departments to help improve the communications content of their activities. In the economic and social field, the Department will build on the very valuable experience gained in promotional activities related to the recent cycle of global conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly (see A/AC.198/1998/2, para. 14).

6. The Strategic Communications Planning Group was established in 1998; the Group consists of the Department Directors and Chiefs of Service. The Group reviews communications policy and strategy to ensure that they reflect the goals and priorities enunciated by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General; the Group also formulates campaigns on priority concerns and ensures interdivisional coordination and execution of all high-priority operations (see A/53/509, para. 7). In 1998, among the major media outreach activities undertaken by the Group were information campaigns on such events as the publication of the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa; the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem; and the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The commemoration, for example, involved a wide range of communication means and channels. All the United Nations information centres implemented special youth outreach activities, in collaboration with educational institutions; they involved local partners in organizing special events; and they undertook extensive media outreach and disseminated human rights information materials translated into local languages. As noted in the medium-term plan 1998–2001, the Department must meet growing information needs in a changing political environment with limited resources (see A/51/6/Rev. 1, para. 23.2). The Department would not be able to sustain the level of activity required by the commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for more than a limited number of priority programmes every year. It is diversifying its approach to implement information strategies, including at the country and regional levels, and is pursuing a more active way of using traditional media, such as radio broadcasting (see paras. 14 and 15 below); and new electronic media, such as the Internet (see paragraph 13 below).

7. OIOS believes that the Department has in place the arrangements and the policy to implement, to the extent possible within the terms of its multiple mandates, recommendations 1 and 2 of the evaluation as endorsed by CPC. The results of the implementation of recommendation 2.B, in particular, need to be reviewed at a later time to

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum.

assess what support the Department was able to obtain from other organizations, so that it can focus further its own resources on a priority programme.

## B. Countering criticism and publicizing newsworthy developments

*Recommendation 3. Countering criticism and publicizing newsworthy developments*

A policy directive should be issued before the end of 1996 requiring the heads of all departments and offices to draw the attention of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information to:

(a) Newsworthy developments in their areas of responsibility, and newsworthy demonstrations of the capabilities and accomplishments of the United Nations;

(b) Misperceptions or misrepresentations of the role of the United Nations. The policy should also provide guidance to senior officials on the nature of what is regarded as newsworthy, and on the immediate actions they should take to counter misperceptions or misrepresentations.

8. In response to OIOS follow-up, at the end of 1996, the Department stated that it approached the Executive Office of the Secretary-General with a view to having the recommended policy directive issued. Instead, in 1996, the head of the Department wrote to the heads of other departments and offices requesting input on newsworthy developments in their areas of responsibility. In the same year, a task force within the Promotion and Public Services Division was established to respond to misperceptions and misrepresentations of the role of the United Nations in the media. Coordination, when required, is conducted by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General's Spokesman. The arrangements in place, which are useful, do not necessarily ensure immediate reaction from Secretariat officials for answering inaccuracies as well as admitting to justified criticism. Full implementation of this recommendation is related to issues addressed in recommendations 7, 8 and 9 (see paragraphs 16–18 below) and to pursuing the objective of the 1997 new orientation of public information to project the Organization as an open, transparent and public institution (see A/AC.198/1998/2, para. 7 (c)). *In response to these observations, the Department noted that currently and in addition to measures previously reported, the Department, together with the Secretary-General's Director for Communications, speech-writers and Spokesman, as well as the Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations, is working through the mechanism of the Communications Group to strengthen oversight of information and communications activities, particularly in response to media comment. This mechanism has enabled the Department to bring items requiring immediate attention to the notice of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General without loss of time and to prepare appropriate responses.* In 1998, to facilitate access to substantive information in the Secretariat, focal points for communications and public information were designated in different departments and offices; presently, there are 14 such focal points. Meetings are held with DPI officers, and are coordinated by the Communications Coordination Service in the office of the Under-Secretary-General for communications and public information.

## C. Targeting audiences

*Recommendation 4. Target audience needs for the Department's print or electronic materials*

A. Redisseminators, who are either the target audience itself or the channel for reaching the target audience, should be the primary source of assessments of needs and demand. The production of all print or electronic materials, recurrent and non-recurrent, should be planned with the public information needs of specific target audiences in mind. These needs should be taken into account in determining the format and content of the material, and the method, scope and timing of its dissemination.

B. Materials produced by specialized agencies, Governments, non-governmental organizations and similar publishing centres that can assist the Department in fulfilling its mandates should be utilized and promoted by the Department.

C. Only print or electronic material, the effective dissemination of which can be adequately funded, should be produced.

9. In response to OIOS follow-up, the Department stated that its Evaluation Unit is assessing the requirements of different key audiences. It is presently working with the Department's Publications Service on an assessment for the publication *Basic Facts about the United Nations*. The Department has been reporting regularly to the Committee on Information on the implementation of its publication strategy. However, the issue addressed in recommendation 4 is still of concern to the General Assembly. At its fifty-

third session, the Assembly emphasized that the publications should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications inside the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner (see Assembly resolution 53/59 B, para. 10).

10. The effective implementation of the Department's policy of targeting and reaching specific audiences is constrained by several factors. Specific target audiences, as defined by the Department, are generally rather large and comprise sub-groups with varied view points and interests. The dissemination of centrally produced materials is sometimes problematic. The capacity to link mailing lists maintained by United Nations information centres and other departments with mailing lists maintained centrally by the Department needs to be enhanced. Time-sensitive materials, such as materials produced for commemorative purposes, are sometimes distributed after the date they should have reached the end-user; in most cases, distribution involves other departments of the Secretariat. The Department stated to OIOS that while every effort is being made to have relevant materials dispatched earlier by mail to the areas which can only receive in that modality, work is also under way to exploit the full potential of the Internet to deliver high quality audio and photo materials for immediate reuse by the media. Complementing that initiative, the Department has been grouping all relevant audio/visual materials on a thematic issue for posting on the United Nations Web site, such as in the case of the observances of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Day of Women.

11. There are a few examples of the Department targeting specific segments of a large target audience and designing products which can reach all or most of this segment of the audience. This was done for the promotion of the 1994–1995 major conferences which targeted the specialized press, with materials designed to suit its needs and the use of specialized mailing lists to reach most of this specialized audience, worldwide. The Department makes use of international decades, years and days to promote thematic issues in such fields as economic and social development and human rights. The promotion of issues related to special sessions of the General Assembly and follow-up to major conferences are also an ongoing priority. In this context, the Department continues to use specialized mailing lists to target specific segments of larger target audiences. Another example is *Africa Recovery*, which has a well defined target audience and the means to reach it. The extensive mailing list of the Africa Recovery Section, which is regularly updated, includes separate priority categories for major international and African media. Because of the publication's unique mandate to focus on a single world region and the range of issues it covers, there is no editorial overlap with other United Nations publications (see A/AC. 198/1997/4, para. 11).

12. Through the network of United Nations information centres, information materials are adapted, to the extent possible, to suit more closely local needs. As the 1997 Task Force noted, in information, one size does not fit all, so the information centres have the task of tailoring and targeting information as appropriate in their particular setting (see report of the Task Force dated August 1997). Unfortunately, cutbacks in budget and personnel have left too many information centres below critical mass for performing a meaningful communications role. The Task Force recommended, *inter alia*, that the Department explore on a country-by-country basis the possibility of forming creative partnerships with the non-governmental organizations sector to amplify the outreach of the United Nations communications service through joint programmes. This issue is related to the implementation of recommendations 2.B and 15 reviewed in the present report.

13. During the period under review, the most significant development which enabled the Department to reach a diverse audience was the increased access to Internet technology. The Department designed different sites to respond to the needs of specific audiences, such as the news site for the media and/or the civil society/business site. In 1995, the Department's sites on the Internet were accessed an average of 16,000 times daily. In 1998, there was an average of 270,000 daily accesses. Sites created by United Nations information centres and information services provide information about the United Nations in the local context and language. In early 1999, there were 19 such sites in countries as diverse as the Czech Republic, Japan and Madagascar.

*Recommendation 5. Diversifying the Department's audio-visual materials*

A. Systematic contact with broadcasters in the different regions by, for example, attendance at annual meetings of regional broadcasters associations, should be established to the extent that resources permit. One aim of this contact should be to ensure that the Department does not miss opportunities to place vignettes and other low-cost audio-visual materials on the United Nations in external television programming.

B. Further diversification of radio programmes to reach specific target audiences should be pursued

through collaboration with other organizations in JUNIC that can provide relevant audio material.

C. A policy clarification should be issued to encourage United Nations information centres and information services to cooperate in the production of local radio and television programmes. They should be provided with support from Headquarters for these efforts.

*Recommendation 6. Study of a United Nations broadcasting capacity*

A feasibility study covering the technical, financial, programming and managerial implications of the development of a United Nations radio broadcasting capacity should be undertaken and submitted for consideration to the Committee on Information at its 1997 session.

14. The development of contacts with broadcasters in different regions was severely curtailed by financial constraints. The Department's radio services made arrangements with other organizations in the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to use their resource material for the development of programmes which reflect the diversity of activities within the United Nations system. While activities at the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna generate valuable resource material, United Nations-related activities in other regions of the world generate equally important resource material to which the radio services have limited access. Some United Nations information centres are dispatching radio material by calling the International Broadcast Centre at Headquarters. When a United Nations related meeting is planned at the regional level, the local United Nations information centre may be authorized to engage the services of a local radio reporter or producer to provide coverage. A policy clarification to encourage United Nations information centres and services to cooperate in the production of local radio and television programmes was included in the 1996 edition of the United Nations information centres manual; the issue is also covered in periodic briefings of United Nations information centres directors at Headquarters. Support, in the form of information material, is provided to all centres at their requests. However, due to lack of resources, it has not been possible to provide the centres with low-cost portable recording and radio feed equipment . Such equipment would have helped the centres to relay radio news to local broadcasters as well as transmit to Headquarters material gathered in their respective regions. The Department is exploring the potential of the Internet for the exchange of high fidelity audio, which could be used by centres in regions where Internet use is well developed.

15. The study on the feasibility of such capacity requested in recommendation 6 was completed in 1998, and its main findings and the related comments and recommendations of the Secretary-General were submitted for consideration of the Committee on Information. The Secretary-General recommended launching a pilot project of daily broadcasts to selected regions in Africa and Europe, with the cost covered from within existing resources (see A/AC.198/1998/4, para. 52). The Committee requested that a report be submitted to it in 1999 on the design and scope of the pilot project. In preparing that report, the Department consulted several regional groups to broaden the scope of the pilot project; several broadcasting alternatives were examined to achieve low costs, or, in some cases, free transmission. At the 1998 JUNIC meeting, several members of JUNIC commended the initiative by the Department, and noted their own interest in the use of radio for public information purposes; they related their experience in working with small stations, particularly in developing countries, and were extremely interested in programming on a variety of issues covered by the United Nations system (see ACC/1998/11, para. 28). The possibility of the collaboration of United Nations information centres with local broadcasters (see para. 14 above) will need to be reviewed in the context of the proposed development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity.

## D. Services to the media

*Recommendation 7. Information materials for the press*

Resources permitting, in addition to the issuance of press releases primarily serving the function of meeting coverage, the News Coverage Service should regularly issue, and immediately post on electronic information networks, background information and information on newsworthy developments targeted to the interests of the general and specialized media. The News Coverage Service should provide this enhanced coverage by coordinating and pooling resources with other services, such as the Office of the Spokesman, the Information and Planning Service and the United Nations information service at Geneva, as well as relevant services of programmes and agencies of the United Nations system.

16. In his report on the implementation of the measures adopted in 1997, the Secretary-General observed that the

development of a more effective news-gathering and delivery system is an immediate priority. A starting point will be the development of the Daily Highlights into a news service. The report announced that the system will include a quick response component geared towards producing and disseminating clear, timely and coherent material on breaking stories, as well as countering misinformation in the various media, and that this capacity will be achieved through pooling of resources, elimination of duplication, and, where necessary, establishment of task forces (see A/AC.198/1998/2, para. 15). This news service is being developed within the Media Division. The Meetings Coverage Section, also in the Media Division, continues to issue press releases covering meetings and other activities taking place at the United Nations. The General Assembly stressed the importance of the continued speedy issue and high quality of those press releases (see Assembly resolution 53/59 B, para. 29). The Department stated to OIOS that the news service being developed will combine a headline news service on E-mail direct to the news desks of print and broadcast media, with expansion of the provision of news on the United Nations home page with coverage of breaking news. The headlines on E-mail, sent three times daily, will refer editors to the fuller stories on the news site and to the on-line press releases. The news site, which will act as a major access point for the media to United Nations news, will have links to sources of news throughout the United Nations system, as well as to news features and other sources of fuller information. OIOS believes that significant progress has been achieved in the implementation of recommendation 7.

*Recommendation 8. Public information aspects of departmental actions*

A. Professional staff in the Office of the Spokesman should be assigned departments concerned with major news stories and should attend relevant departmental staff meetings, and receive regular briefings from senior staff in their department of assignment on the public information aspects of the work of the department and important decisions made.

B. The Department of Public Information should bring to the attention of the Office of the Spokesman relevant information originating from departments not covered directly by the Office.

17. The Spokesman's Office maintained active exchanges with departments, in particular with the Departments of Public Information and Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and its representatives attended their meetings. The 1997 Task Force observed that the Office is said to have become much more news-oriented in the past three years, and to have better access to information within the Secretariat but that unfortunately it is severely handicapped by a shortage of staff, which makes it impossible for the Office to respond to many press inquiries in a timely fashion or to search out information from the substantive departments in order to give informed answers, which often means that the Organization's views and positions simply go unreported (see report of the Task Force). Regarding recommendation 8.B, the Office stated, in response to OIOS follow-up, that in the interests of efficiency the Spokesman's preference is to develop sources directly within the target department. In addition, the Department continues to bring relevant information to his attention. With its network of focal points throughout the Secretariat (see para. 8 above), the capacity of the Department to contribute to the work of the Spokesman's Office is being enhanced.

*Recommendation 9. Secretary-General's bulletin on disclosure of information*

A Secretary-General's bulletin should be issued by the end of 1996 to facilitate prompt access to United Nations officials by media organizations. The bulletin should define what information must remain confidential and aim at encouraging United Nations officials to speak informally to the media, and to accept requests for formal interviews. This guidance should emphasize the importance of the maximum feasible transparency of operations. The Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General should monitor the application of the guidance in the bulletin.

18. The in-depth evaluation noted that there are no guidelines on media relations issued to the Secretariat as a whole, and senior officials do not feel encouraged to speak to the press. This inability of United Nations officials to brief the press routinely on an informal basis, even in cases where information is of a technical nature or has already been made public, handicaps efforts to shape stories and get the Organization's views across to the public (E/AC.51/1996/2, para. 37). At the end of 1996, in response to OIOS follow-up, the Department stated that the Secretary-General is in the process of issuing guidelines on relations with the media, which would encourage openness with the media at all levels of the Secretariat. It was expected that the guidelines would be issued by the end of March 1997. At the end of 1998, the Department commented further that the Office of the Spokesman agreed with the recommendation that guidelines be issued as a Secretary-General bulletin and

was prepared to work with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to develop them. In March 1999, media guidelines were approved by the Secretary-General and distributed to all members of the Senior Management Group; however, no bulletin had been issued as of the end of that month. Considering the difficulties of the Office of the Spokesman to respond to many press inquiries (see para. 17 above), the issuance of the bulletin could lay the basis for increased contact between the press and substantive areas of the Secretariat in an organized fashion, and facilitate access to information on the activities of the Organization. To achieve the desired result, the bulletin needs to define clearly what information can be appropriately shared with the press at this level of interaction. One possible element of such a policy of disclosure would be to designate an officer in each substantive department who would respond to queries by the press.

*Recommendation 10. Effectiveness of press conferences and speaking engagements*

A. To reduce scheduling conflicts among press conferences at Headquarters and at Geneva by officials of the United Nations and officials of Governments and other organizations, the Office of the Spokesman should oversee the schedules of and preparations for such events.

B. The Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the Office of the Spokesman, should ensure that United Nations officials scheduled for press conferences or speaking engagements receive guidance on preparing statements for the press or the public and training on how to communicate effectively.

19. The Office of the Spokesman schedules all press conferences at New York Headquarters; the Director of the United Nations Information Service assumes the same task at Geneva. Scheduling difficulties can result from unforeseen circumstances, such as the emergency meetings of the Security Council and related statements to the press from Secretariat officials and delegations. Regarding recommendation 10.B, OIOS was informed by the Department that the Office of the Spokesman is ready to assist United Nations officials in preparing for press conferences whenever requested to do so. Recommendation 10.B envisaged a more active involvement by the Department.

*Recommendation 11. Coverage of United Nations activities by the visual media*

Taking into account security considerations and the concerns of delegations, the visual media should be guaranteed access to activities of the United Nations adequate to their needs. This direct coverage by the visual media should be maintained in a manner that is not disruptive to the work of the Organization under procedures, such as pooling of assignments, worked out in consultation with the media organizations involved.

*Recommendation 12. Strengthening media liaison*

A. The Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit should be responsible for all aspects of requests by the media, in close collaboration with the Office of the Spokesman.

B. In carrying out this function, the Unit should coordinate with all relevant technical, security and substantive services units within the Secretariat in such a way as to provide same-day response to media requests.

C. The Unit should make analogous longer-term coordination arrangements in preparation for coverage of scheduled upcoming events by eliciting from the media requests for future services.

20. Recommendation 11 was not implemented. The in-depth evaluation noted that existing practices were sometimes an impediment to coverage by the visual media; such practices have not been reviewed. United Nations Television continued to serve as the world television pool for the coverage of official meetings and events, including the activities of the Secretary-General. During the period, the Department's efforts were directed at enhancing access to its services, in particular by the introduction of new technology. Many broadcasters find the audio and video tape coverage of events and meetings in New York and Geneva useful, although they say that it is overly bureaucratic (see report of the Task Force). *In response to these observations, the Department commented that the further review of practices recommended is unnecessary. Television crews and news photographers have ready access to most events occurring at Headquarters. Often, prior arrangements are not necessary. When needed, photographer pools are created. United Nations Television provides pool television coverage in all cases.*

21. In response to OIOS follow-up, the Department stated that the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit worked

closely with the Office of the Spokesman in responding to enquiries from the media. The Unit handled all practical arrangements related to the audio and visual coverage by the outside media, within the limitations mentioned above. The Unit updated the booklet "Guidelines and information for correspondents". During the period under review, the Office of the Spokesman became, increasingly, the Secretariat's main interface with the working press. The 1997 Task Force noted that, in relation to the provision of information to the press, the Office has little contact with the rest of the Department in the course of its daily work. There is minimal coordination between them, in large part because their responsibilities are not seen to overlap (see report of the Task Force). OIOS believes that the role that the Unit should play in respect to greater coordination within the Department in relation to the provision of facilities and services for the media, as requested years ago by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/73 B, needs to be reassessed.

## E. Services at the regional and local levels

*Recommendation 13. Support to the media at the regional and local levels*

The Department should continue to develop low-cost initiatives, such as those mentioned in paragraphs 47 and 48 [of the evaluation report], that would increase coverage of United Nations activities by providing more targeted services to the media at the regional and local levels. These initiatives should be implemented by the pooling of resources between those JUNIC members with relevant television and training programmes and in partnership with regional and local media organizations.

22. The Department has encouraged other members of JUNIC to work together on joint projects, including training programmes, with regional and local media organizations. The Department's radio services are developing a roster of local radio producers to cover the activities of organizations of the United Nations system. The JUNIC information exchange bulletin disseminates information among JUNIC members on their upcoming activities. When such information is provided early enough, collaboration is greatly facilitated. At its 1998 session, JUNIC agreed on the need to reinvigorate the Committee, especially between sessions, and strengthen ongoing communications among members in order to better use the existing machinery in coordination of system-wide public information and communications initiatives (see ACC/1998/11, para. 7). The success of United Nations information centres in presenting a unified image of the United Nations system continues to depend on the level of cooperation and coordination achieved among United Nations offices at the country level. Nearly half the United Nations information centres have been integrated with the offices of resident coordinators. The 1997 Task Force reported that substantial problems have arisen as a result, and recommended that information centre staff become a communications services group under the resident coordinator, who would be responsible to the head of the Department for developing a plan for how the United Nations global themes can best be adapted and articulated locally (see report of the Task Force). The Task Force recommendation on greater involvement by the Department in the selection and evaluation of resident coordinators acting also as information centre directors remains largely unimplemented to date. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) informed OIOS that the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel on the Selection of Resident Coordinators will now invite the Department to attend its meetings in cases where resident coordinators are expected to act as information centre directors.

*Recommendation 14. Support to United Nations information centres*

A. For United Nations information centres established before 1960 that do not have host country agreements, increased efforts should be made by the Department to negotiate such agreements, reflecting the principles of General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV).

[Section B of the recommendation was not approved by CPC]

23. In 1996, all United Nations information centres that did not have host country agreements were encouraged to initiate negotiations with the host Governments to conclude agreements that reflect the principles of General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV). The Department provided these information centres with a standard draft host country agreement for adaptation to their specific circumstances. At the end of 1996, 18 information centres reported that they had entered in negotiations on agreements with the host Governments. In 1998, two new agreements had been concluded.

*Recommendation 15. Strategy for collaboration with non-governmental organizations*

In consultation with the Non-Governmental Organization Executive Committee, CONGO and WFUNA, the Department should, by the end of 1996,

define priority areas for collaboration with non-governmental organizations, with special attention to those organizations that have as their mission the promotion of the goals and purposes of the United Nations. The overall aim should be to develop the capacity of non-governmental organizations to disseminate public information on United Nations activities.

*Recommendation 16. Coordination of United Nations services working with non-governmental organizations*

The interdepartmental working group on non-governmental organizations should, by the end of 1996, make proposals to JUNIC for joint implementation of support to non-governmental organizations. Taking into account legislative mandates, these proposals should include, for example, the merging of newsletters and publications and jointly organized meetings and seminars.

24. The Department did not define a new strategy for collaboration with non-governmental organizations in consultation with associations or groupings of non-governmental organizations as envisaged in recommendation 15. This recommendation is closely related to recommendation 2.B and the need to define areas for collaboration with appropriate organizations so that the Department obtains greater support from them. Nevertheless, it should be noted that during the period under review, the Department intensified its outreach activities to non-governmental organizations; and that these activities were contributing to the purpose of recommendation 15. The Department's NGO Section continued to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the non-governmental organization thematic committees — such as those on disarmament, aging, and sustainable development — and worked closely with non-governmental organization offices of other organizations of the United Nations system. The annual Department of Public Information/NGO conference, organized at Headquarters, provided a significant platform for the dissemination of information to active non-governmental organizations and for dialogue between them, United Nations officials and representatives of Member States. The conference was attended, in 1997, by 1,800 representatives from 61 countries. A number of United Nations information centres organized parallel non-governmental organization conferences at the national and regional levels, so that non-governmental organizations unable to attend the Headquarters conference can network and exchange information with other national non-governmental organizations working on United Nations-related issues (on the need to further develop collaborative arrangements, as envisaged in recommendations 2.B and 15, see para. 12 above). *In response to these observations, the Department noted that all non-governmental organizations associated with the Department are expected to share and promote the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations; they have a demonstrated interest in United Nations issues and proven ability to reach large or specialized audiences; and last but not the least, they have the commitment and means to conduct effective information programmes about United Nations activities. The Department works closely with the Department of Public Information/NGO Executive Committee with regard to the organization of the annual The Department of Public Information/NGO Conference as well as organizing the weekly non-governmental organization briefings and other programmes.*

25. In 1996 and 1997, the Department brought the issue addressed in recommendation 16 to the attention of the members of the interdepartmental working group on non-governmental organizations, so that proposals be made to JUNIC as envisaged in the recommendation. Since then, however, the group has not made any such proposals to JUNIC. In comments on an earlier draft of the present report, the Department stated to OIOS that the Department will again bring the issue addressed in the recommendation to the attention of the working group which is chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations. In a related action, the Department suggested, at the 1996 session of JUNIC, that the non-governmental organization units of JUNIC members meet under the auspices of JUNIC with a view to strengthening coordination among themselves to improve the services rendered to non-governmental organizations; JUNIC approved the suggestion. No further action was reported on this initiative. In the context of JUNIC, the Department encouraged further support to the Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS). In 1998, following the strategic review of the role of NGLS, in the context of the policy of strengthening partnerships between the United Nations and civil society, JUNIC encouraged NGLS to continue its efforts, and noted that the work of NGLS complements and supports the work of individual organizations of the United Nations system. JUNIC brought to the attention of ACC the continuing precarious funding situation of NGLS, and requested it to give this matter an urgent consideration (see ACC/1998/11, para. 13 (c)).

## F. Services to substantive departments

### 1. United Nations publications

*Recommendation 18. Policy for approving new United Nations publications*

A. The Publications Board should adopt a policy by the end of 1996 requiring departments to establish departmental reading committees, or a procedure for peer review of technical publications, which should follow standard external procedures for such reviews adapted to the requirements of the United Nations.

B. Subsequent to the inclusion of a publication in the publications programme, submissions by departments to the working group of the Publications Board should be accompanied by an assessment of the reading committee or peer review mechanism evaluating the manuscript and identifying target audiences and the dissemination strategy to be followed in promoting the publication.

C. Where the reading committee or peer review assessment suggests a rewriting of the manuscript, this should be done before the departmental submission is made to the Publications Board.

26. The in-depth evaluation noted that in 1993, the Department set up a working group to review United Nations publications policies, practices and operations. The review indicated that there were problems with quality control and distribution. It was noted that quality control of the contents and presentation of publications through peer reviews and other procedures was not systematic; no coherent mechanisms existed to stop the publication of a manuscript whose contents were so mediocre as to reflect negatively on the image of the United Nations (see E/AC.51/1996/2, para. 63). In 1996, at the time of the in-depth evaluation, it was noted that regarding print-runs and distribution, there are indications of progress, owing in part to the action of the working group of the Publications Board and of the various units of the Department concerned with publications. Quality control, however, is difficult to exercise; departments must be responsible for the quality of the publications they produce (E/AC.51/1996/2, para. 64). In 1997, in response to OIOS follow-up, the Department observed that the proposal to establish departmental reading committees or a procedure for peer review — envisaged in recommendation 18.A — had been put forward several times in the past without meeting much response from the author departments. The matter was placed on the agenda of the Publications Board at its June 1997 meeting. The Board decided to set up an ad hoc group to examine the question of initiating a policy of peer review. At its 1998 meeting, the Publications Board discussed again the matter of quality control in United Nations publications, noting that it did not appear to be feasible to agree on a centralized policy of peer review, although quality control was of major concern to departments, and that there were instances of some type of review process for publications. The Board agreed on pilot projects to obtain feedback from appropriate user groups on selected publications. Such practice has merits of its own but it is not responding to the purpose of recommendation 18, which is to enhance the quality of manuscripts before they are published.

27. Regarding recommendation 18.B and the identification of target audiences and dissemination strategies, a publications promotion working group of the Working Committee of the Publications Board was established in 1996 to facilitate the production and marketing of United Nations publications. In 1997, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) prepared a report entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (A/52/685). The report contains a number of observations and recommendations closely related to the concerns addressed in recommendation 18. CPC endorsed most of the recommendations contained in the JIU report, with the understanding, on matters related to the role of the Publications Board, that the Board would facilitate rather than control the publications.

### 2. Library services

*Recommendation 19. Plan for improving access to information*

By the end of the first quarter of 1997, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library should develop, on the basis of its reference desks' survey of users' needs, a plan for improving access to United Nations documentation and on-line services by delegations, Secretariat officials and other official groups.

28. At the end of 1996, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library conducted the questionnaire-based user survey referred to in recommendation 19. In the report of the evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library carried out in 1997, as requested in General Assembly resolution 51/138 B, the consultants stated that user surveys are beneficial and that they should be conducted periodically, but that more care should be exercised in their design, administration and analysis (see A/AC.198/1997/2, para. 35). They recommended that carefully designed, administered and analysed user-surveys be conducted periodically. The Secretary-General concurred with this recommendation and decided that every three

years, a specific area of library services (reference services, serials use, use of specialized agency materials, etc.) should be surveyed (see A/AC.198/1997/2/Add. 1, para. 2, recommendation 10). The Communications Coordination Service of the Department has the expertise to design evaluation surveys; the Dag Hammarskjöld Library plans to work in cooperation with the Service in the design of its future user surveys.

29. Since 1997, based on its survey, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library developed further a number of services and took new initiatives. Among these were the expansion of its core series of training courses and the introduction of new courses on topics related to the work of the Organization. In 1997, 864 Secretariat and Mission staff members attended such training. UN-I-QUE, a user-friendly guide to the symbols and sales numbers of tens of thousands of selected documents and publications from 1946 to the present, was launched in January 1997. The Library's presence on the Internet continued to increase; the Library site was accessed more than 1.4 million times in 1998. Existing features have been expanded. For example, the most frequently accessed component — the United Nations documentation research guide — has been enhanced through the addition of specialized chapters, more detailed explanations and links to the full text of General Assembly resolutions as they become available. The selective dissemination of information — tailored information provided at regular intervals to a user — continued to grow. In 1998, the total number of electronically delivered documents was over 2.9 million, compared to 1.7 million in 1997, and 150,000 in 1996. The Library also conducted a number of workshops, visits and training activities for individuals tailored to the needs of librarians working in the depository libraries.

# III. Conclusions and recommendations

## A. Conclusions

30. **Broadly speaking, the Department of Public Information implemented recommendations 6, 10.A, 14.A and 19 in a manner that addresses the purpose of these recommendations. The Department made progress towards implementing recommendations 3, 8 and 15.**

31. **Measures adopted in 1997 and 1998, following the reorientation of United Nations public information activities initiated under the reforms of the Secretary-General and adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/70 B, enabled the Department of Public Information to set up new arrangements which may contribute to the implementation of recommendation 1 on the overall strategy of the Department, recommendation 2.A on the annual priority programme and recommendation 7 on information materials for the press. The results of the closer collaboration with other departments and organizations of the United Nations system, and progress in building partnerships with important redisseminators of information, which is "a key feature of the new orientation of communications policies" and which should lead to better "use of the limited resources available to the Department" (see A/AC. 198/1998/2, summary, eighth paragraph), also needs to be reviewed at a later time to assess to what extent this orientation contributed to the implementation of recommendations 2.B, 4, 5, 10.B, 11, 12, 13 and 16.**

## B. Recommendations

32. **Although media guidelines exist, no Secretary-General's bulletin on the disclosure of information has been issued. As the focal point for information within the Secretariat, the Department of Public Information should ensure implementation of recommendation 1 below in a manner that will address the issues raised in paragraph 18 above. The Department should continue to seek the agreement of the Publications Board to ensure implementation of recommendation 2 below in a manner that will address the issues raised in paragraphs 26 and 27 above.**

**Recommendation 1. Secretary-General's bulletin on disclosure of information**

**A Secretary-General's bulletin should be issued by September 1999 to facilitate prompt access to United Nations officials by media organizations. The bulletin should provide policy guidelines encouraging United Nations officials to speak informally to the media, and to accept requests for formal interviews. This guidance should emphasize the importance of the maximum feasible transparency of operations. The Director of Communications in the Office of the Secretary-General should monitor the application of the guidance in the bulletin.**

**Recommendation 2. Policy for approving new United Nations publications**

**The Publications Board should adopt a policy by the end of 1999 requiring departments to establish departmental reading committees, or a procedure for peer review of technical publications, which should follow standard external procedures for such reviews adapted to the requirements of the United Nations. Each author department should adopt arrangements adapted to the nature of its work.**

(*Signed*) Karl Th. **Paschke**
Under-Secretary-General
for Internal Oversight Services